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## ONE PHASE OF LITERARY CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH.

As one observes the literary developments in the Southern States of to-day the most noticeable feature is the many small and disconnected efforts being made to present a literary appearance. Within a very few years a number of small magazines of a general character have been started in different large cities, while here and there energetic college professors have founded magazines of a technical, historical, or critical nature, and have gathered about themselves small but interested circles of writers and readers. Newspapers, too, endeavor to print a more readable page, and, while striving to give the reader an intelligently written and pleasing account of the world's doings, fortunately have escaped the wild, sensational, fantastic articles of the Northern Sunday sheet. Conservatism has thus been in some ways a blessing.

Nor does the South of to-day lack entirely for writers. A surprisingly large number of magazine writers are Southerners; well-known editors of Southern birth are numerous, and books by Southern men and women are now commonly found among the "best sellers" of the month. The majority of these writers, however, go to the North, achieve their success in the North, remain in the North; and some, living no longer in the home land, seemingly forget the old surroundings and cease to write a note of Southern flavor. Of course the South may claim all of these; but when all is said, how little does the literature of America depend for its existence upon the South!

What is needed? What must be done for the cause of literature in these States? How shall its influence, scope, and value be enlarged? Suggestion after suggestion has been made. The undoubted value of public libraries has been mentioned; some have argued the need of a great Southern magazine, and lately some have taken the erroneous view

that a Southern publishing house is the prime necessity. Surely the latter idea is wrong. Can the location of a printing press vitally affect a literature? There can be no doubt as to the answer. A piece of English literature might be printed in Russia and still be English literature. A production of the South might be published in Canada and still be a Southern work. It matters little, this question of place. True, we need a strong magazine to be in close touch with Southern sentiments and interests, but surely Southern letters can thrive without that. A publishing house which would study the needs and opportunities of the South would be helpful, but is it absolutely essential? These are but aids; they do not strike to the root of the trouble. The great need for the production of literature in the Southern States is *a Southern reading public*.

The true strength of a church lies not in its pastor; the real power of a company is not in its captain. The rank and file at last decide every conquest. A few writers, a strong magazine, a great publishing house, cannot create a literature in the South. The common people, and they alone, can make it possible. The main trouble has been, and is yet, that too few Southerners read books. A certain class read the newspapers and can discuss politics fairly well, but literature—they know it not. It is as impossible under such conditions to create a literature as it is to sustain one.

What, then, must the South have? Above all else, it must have a numerous average citizenship that can discern and appreciate good literature. Prejudice must go. The Southerner must be able and willing to recognize a good work, whether by a foreigner or a native of his own country, a Northerner or a Southerner, a white man or a black man; and, more important still, he must be able to see the true literary size and importance of his own section. Because a work is by a man of the South, he must not laud it as a masterpiece. Let every Southern writer be encouraged, but let him ever be compared with the world's standard and not be puffed up with the vanity of sectionalism. Alas for the vain-glorious local poet! Nearly every Southern State has its

own anthology, and therein are gathered the priceless gems of her aspiring sons and daughters. Bound in elegant covers, it takes a prominent place in the school library, while Milton and Tennyson repose in dusty obscurity. Thus the true proportions of literary excellence are lost sight of, and literature becomes a local thing and ceases to be literature.

With these evils perceived, the main problem is their correcting. How shall we secure an intelligent, discerning, literature-loving public? Writers of Southern birth can no more create *it* than they can a Southern literature without it. Southern publications and Southern publishing houses are equally helpless. Whence cometh our help? The burden lies mainly upon one class of citizens—the *Southern public school teacher*. He of all persons possesses the enviable opportunity of making lovers of literature. The college professor can but aid; for when the public school sends to him these rapidly maturing students totally indifferent to the glories of letters, and indeed ignorant of the most general literary facts, he can do little toward changing the callous brain.

But the school-teacher may mold the gentle mind. He may read the best to his students; he may place the best before them; he may talk of the best to them; he may *compel* them to read only the best during school hours. The very state of being with the best will lift the boy and girl. Man cannot live with gods and be a brute. Time will cause marvelous changes in the tastes of the students, and under such conditions they not only will love the best but will crave a wider knowledge of the great figures and forces in literature. Then, when such a fortunate state exists, there will no longer occur the humiliating sight of students knocking for admittance to Southern colleges and yet unable to write their application in decent English. Then, also, we shall cease to see the still more dismal scene of students struggling with the philology of the English language and yet ignorant of the basic facts of its literature.

But such a time awaits the coming of the literature-loving teacher. And how few are such instructors! The man who

drums rules of grammar into children's heads is not a teacher of English. Too many monstrosities in the grammatical way are already abroad in the land. Full many a teacher of the South can boast with the old North Carolina pedagogue that he can parse every word in "Paradise Lost," and "can take the English language by the tail and crack it like a whip." What can such a man know of the glories of Milton? Mere grammar and rhetoric will not create literature lovers. The placing of good books before the school child, and the compelling him to read them or none, count in the end for far more than a glib knowledge of cases and tenses. So long as the grammar is master of the pedagogue, the cause of literature will suffer. Let us have books, good books, the masterpieces. A campaign for good reading among Southern children is one of the crying needs of the hour. When the South has reading children, it will have a reading public; when it has a reading public, the magazines and publishing houses will come as a consequence. Above all else, *it will have a literature.*

Such, then, are some of the literary conditions in Southern States. There are some writers; there are some small ventures in magazines; there is a large class of poorly prepared, poorly paid teachers; and overshadowing all with its dismal cloud is the vast public of blacks and whites who know nothing of literature, who have no opportunity to know of it, and who do not care to know of it. This is the indifferent but destructive enemy of letters in the South. It creates no literature; it demands none. It spreads its vast wings between the sun of ability and the field of opportunity, and the seeds of literature die for nourishment. Until this blighting force is driven away, the South can expect no great production. For Literature does not spring from Ignorance. When the actual public of the South can read and wants to read, thinks and is eager to find its thoughts expressed, then, and then only, will a literature characteristic and worthy of Southern life, sentiments, thoughts, and passions be brought forth.

CARL HOLLIDAY.